

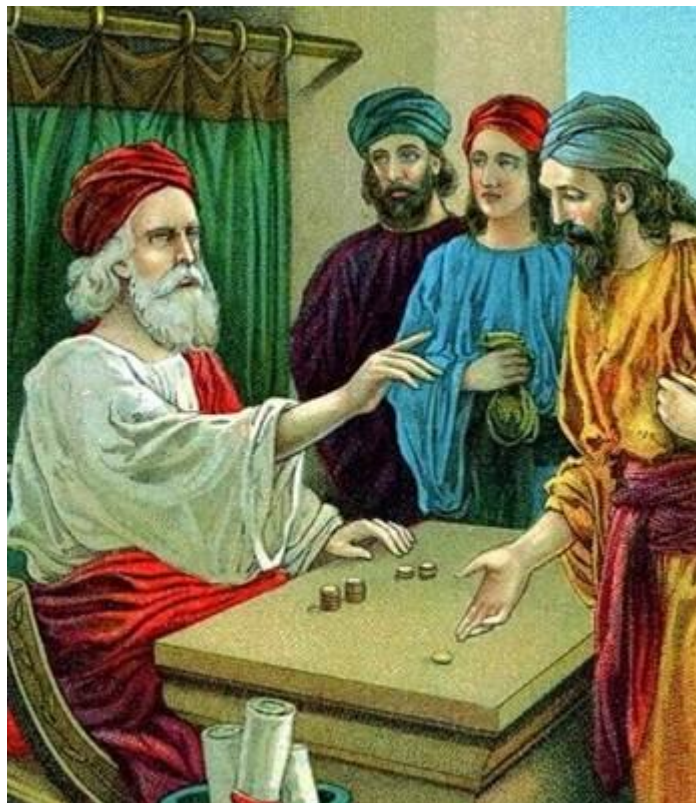


Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time A



Parable of the Five Talents



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

Trust In God's Heavenly Promise

My God, let me know and love you,
so that I may find my happiness in you.
Since I cannot fully achieve this on earth,
help me to improve daily
until I may do so to the full.
Enable me to know you ever more on earth,
so that I may know you perfectly in heaven.
Enable me to love you ever more on earth,
so that I may love you perfectly in heave.
In that way my joy may be great on earth,
and perfect with you in heaven.

O God of truth,
grant me the happiness of heaven
so that my joy may be full in accord with your promise.
In the meantime let my mind dwell on that happiness,
my tongue speak of it,
my heart pine for it,
my mouth pronounce it,
my soul hunger for it,
my flesh thirst for it,
and my entire being desire it
until I enter through death
in the joy of my Lord forever.

Amen.

St. Augustine of Hippo

Catholic
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& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks focus on the primary theme of eschatology, last things, end of days and life after death.
- ▶ It is also the focus of the end of the liturgical cycle.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

- ▶ The Book of Proverbs written in about the eighth or ninth century BC is a collection of wise sayings and proverbs.
- ▶ Since Solomon was remembered for his incomparable wisdom he is the attributed author. He is similarly named the author of Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom and the Song of Solomon.
- ▶ (Very often famous personages of the Old Testament were named authors of certain works in order to provide more credence and authenticity to a particular book or work. It is logical that Solomon would be named the author of books having to do with wisdom since in Israel he was considered wisdom's patron saint. Scholars believe that there were other authors who actually penned those books.)
- ▶ Taking center stage in the opening chapter of the Book of Proverbs is wisdom personified as a woman-*Lady Wisdom*.
- ▶ This lovely Lady promises wealth, happiness, prosperity and a long life for those who follow her instruction.
- ▶ The woman metaphor serves as bookends to the Book of Proverbs. It opens with Lady Wisdom and ends with a woman who embraces her counsel, who follows her instruction. This woman is referred to as the *woman of worth*.
- ▶ The *lady of worth* ministers to all with whom she comes in contact. She is an ordinary woman. The only thing extraordinary about her is the way she cares for God's people. She simply takes care of the needs of everyone comes to her in need. She is certainly someone we can all emulate.
- ▶ She accomplishes her mission with great skill and commitment.
- ▶ Following the counsel of *Lady Wisdom*, she is a blessing not only to her family but to friends and community as well, bringing great joy to them all.
- ▶ She finds great contentment doing the ordinary tasks of life.
- ▶ When one has wisdom in his or her life no task is too boring, too routine, too mundane or beneath a person's dignity.
- ▶ Every activity is an opportunity to encounter God in one's life. Such is Lady Wisdom's counsel.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ How is this a relevant word for believers today?
- ▶ Have you ever met Lady Wisdom? In other words have you ever encountered the living God in the wisdom offered to you by another person?
- ▶ “She finds great contentment doing the ordinary tasks of life?” Can the same thing be said of you?
- ▶ Do you know anyone who typifies this reading? If so, why did you choose that person?
- ▶ Why is wisdom such an important attribute? What happens when we do not open our lives to Lady Wisdom’s counsel?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about our relationship with God?

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

- ▶ Paul’s context for understanding the Lord’s return is the Jewish understanding of the “Day of the Lord”.
- ▶ At one time in Israel’s history the term referred to a future day when Israel would be triumphant over her enemies.
- ▶ The prophets shattered their lofty vision by citing their idolatry, insincere worship, as well as indifference and inattention to the poor among them. He insisted that their transgressions were reason enough for the coming day of retribution for sin.
- ▶ Isaiah referred to it as a time when God would be victorious over the sin and arrogance of the people.
- ▶ After the Babylonian exile the “Day of the Lord” was understood in an eschatological sense, having to do with end times.
- ▶ The unjust would be punished and the righteous would be vindicated.
- ▶ This is how the early Christian community understood Jesus’ return.
- ▶ Jesus would come to judge the living and the dead.
- ▶ Those unprepared for his return would be severely judged.
- ▶ The righteous would be vindicated.
- ▶ Paul intended to calm the fears of a community who looked toward that great and terrible day with fear and trepidation.
- ▶ They worried about their readiness: “What if we are not as ready as we should be?”

- ▶ Paul squelched their fear with the promise of hope.
- ▶ He reminded them that yes the day was coming but since they were the Lord's saints they were already living in that day in the present day.
- ▶ They were living in the end of days, the last age.
- ▶ They simply needed to be attentive and continue to do the Lord's bidding.
- ▶ They were to place their hope in the crucified and risen Lord.
- ▶ They were already beneficiaries of the salvation Jesus accomplished through his sacrifice on the cross.
- ▶ The Thessalonians community knew what it meant to be ready at a moment's notice for whatever might come their way.
- ▶ They were oppressed by the Roman government. They never knew when their freedom or their lives would be in danger as a result of the government's actions or decrees.
- ▶ Paul reminded them that the same diligence is needed when it comes to being prepared for the Lord's return.
- ▶ Christians must be ready at all times for any and all things as they await the Lord's coming.
- ▶ He reminded them that they were to continue to live in the Lord's light and his shadow.
- ▶ The light within them was to shine for all to see thus leading others into its brilliance—the light of resurrected Christ.
- ▶ They could be confident of the hope they shared and therefore must cast aside all fear.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ In what way can you relate to the Thessalonians community's fears? Have you ever had to wait for anything with fear and trepidation? What did the experience teach you about the mystery of waiting?
- ▶ Have you ever been granted a hope which passes all understanding? Describe the experience.

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30 or 25:14-15, 19-21

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Jesus calls us to faithfulness in today's parable.
- ▶ The faithful servants risk their own security to make the best use of the gifts they were given.
- ▶ Every living person is imbued with inherent gifts. Every living person either squanders those gifts or allows them to bear fruit; for some, abundant fruit. We all share the responsibility to do the latter, not the former.
- ▶ Through the medium of story Jesus reminds believers that fear has no place when it comes to utilizing the gifts we have been given. The servant who was given only one talent was paralyzed into inaction due to fear. He was fearful he would squander the gift he was given and thus be punished.
- ▶ Disciples must cast aside such fear; fear cripples effective ministry and discipleship.
- ▶ Such fear is observed in Peter and the disciples in Matthew's eighth chapter (8:26; 14:30-31). They could not act; they stood paralyzed into inaction.
- ▶ Matthew includes this parable in the eschatological section in which Jesus teaches the disciples to be diligent when waiting for his return after death.
- ▶ The parable sets the stage for the theology of final judgment. One will either be saved or not. It is an either/or proposition.
- ▶ The parable reminds listeners to be faithful as they await the end of days. It is also an exhortation to be attentive to our intimate relationship with God. We will either grow in faith or faith will diminish. When faith is gone judgment is not far behind.
- ▶ What is the significance of the talents?
- ▶ The talent was the largest denomination of money at the time.
- ▶ The coins needed to make up the talents would have weighed between fifty-seven to seventy-four pounds.
- ▶ Even though the amount was huge, the master insisted that the servant was given a "little". What is going on here?
- ▶ This is a parable that describes what it means to live in the kingdom of God. It is often referred to as a *how much more* parable.
- ▶ The servant was faithful in regard to something insignificant in the overall context of salvation. He was faithful in his handling of money.
- ▶ How much more then, would he be faithful when it comes to what really counts, faithfulness and commitment to the reign of God.

- ▶ If the servant was creative, imaginative and industrious when it came to something as insignificant as money, imagine how much more creative, imaginative and industrious he would be when it comes to establishing God's reign.
- ▶ Our common saying, "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" can be aptly applied to Matthew's theme today. The spiritually rich will get richer and the spiritually poor will become destitute.
- ▶ Those who are spiritually wealthy can be assured of their eternal reward in heaven. Those who are spiritually impoverished do not have the same assurance.
- ▶ This parable is one among several judgment parables. Other judgment parables judged Christian leaders as well as Christian disciples in their commitment to the kingdom.
- ▶ This judgment parable judges people in the right use of gifts, service to the kingdom.
- ▶ The third slave does not love his Master. He was only worried about his own well-being. He cared little about service to God's reign.
- ▶ He refused to offer his meager gift in service to God's reign.
- ▶ Each person in the Christian community is gifted. Some people possess meager gifts and other people are hugely gifted.
- ▶ Regardless of whether our gift is large or small we have the responsibility of offering it in service to God and the community.
- ▶ When we offer our gift in humble service God takes that gift and multiplies it for the benefit of God's people.
- ▶ The parable illustrates that love of God, not fear of God, and faithful stewardship are gifts we are all called to share with God's people.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question.

- ▶ Have you ever experienced a fear strong enough to paralyze you? What did the experience teach you about fear? What does Jesus teach us about such fear?
- ▶ The delay of the Master's return in the parable was an opportunity for the slaves to creatively and imaginatively grow and to risk everything in service to the kingdom.
- ▶ It is very possible that none of Jesus' listeners positively reacted to this parable.
- ▶ In ancient times it was believed that all the goods of the world had already been distributed. There was little or no hope of getting more of those already distributed goods. There were no extra commodities lurking under a rock for someone to find.

- ▶ The only way to get more was to cheat someone out of theirs; thus placing him or under suspicion that they had stolen the newly-gotten goods.
- ▶ Everyone distrusted the rich for just that reason. As a result the rich would hire slaves who were already considered untrustworthy to go out and commit dishonest deeds on their behalf.
- ▶ A hook in the parable positions the rich man as an honorable person. Yet the third servant paints an altogether different portrait of him claiming that he was a hard man and reaped what he did not sow.
- ▶ Twenty-first century listeners would think the rich master was a good business man. First century listeners would have regarded him as arrogant and opportunistic but above all else greedy.
- ▶ The master agrees with the servant's perception of him and insists that if he already knew that why did he not at least put the money in the bank where it could draw interest? How stupid of him!
- ▶ The first two slaves not only served their master they behaved just like him: arrogant, opportunistic and greedy.
- ▶ The poor of antiquity would have found little good news thus far. It would have only confirmed what they already knew to be true. Since there was only so much to go around, the rich increased their wealth on the backs of the poor.
- ▶ If this was how Jesus was suggesting God acts in relation to human beings who needs God anyway?
- ▶ Eusebius, the ancient Roman historian, scholar of the Biblical canon and bishop of Caesarea in Palestine in 314 noticed the problem in the parable and posited a solution. He cited a different outcome from the lost ancient Gospel of the Nazarenes.
- ▶ He cited a different outcome from the lost (non-canonical) ancient Gospel of the Nazarenes.
- ▶ One scholar wonders if this might not have been the original story Jesus told.
- ▶ It is possible that a circumstance in Matthew's community prompted a re-write of the story.
- ▶ However, it is Matthew's Gospel that has come down to us as the inspired word of God—not the lost Gospel of the Nazarenes.
- ▶ The Lectionary has chosen this reading because of its eschatological context (issues dealing with eternal life, after life and heaven and hell, etc.).
- ▶ Matthew's community was beginning to have doubts about Jesus' return. It was about fifty years after his death and there was no sign of his imminent return.
- ▶ Matthew's community was impatiently waiting for Jesus to return.
- ▶ Matthew's theological intent was to encourage the people in their waiting and to present the hope of eternal life and final judgment to them as they waited.
- ▶ Matthew insisted that it was better to risk a person's entire life than play it safe and do nothing to establish the kingdom as they waited for Jesus to return.
- ▶ Risking one's security was a lot to ask, but Matthew presented a convincing argument and held out the hope we all share in his exhortation to the community.
- ▶ Jesus took risks and it cost him his life. We are to follow Jesus to the cross if necessary because of what awaits us a—that final reunion with Christ at the feet of

his throne.

- ▶ It is important that we listen to this parable with first century peasant ears. Perhaps it would not hurt to keep in mind the story told in the Gospel of the Nazarenes and bring that into conversation with Matthew's agenda.
- ▶ Both perspectives are worthy of our reflection.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ Matthew needed to shed light on what it means to be a community that continues to wait for Jesus' return and for the last judgment. In what way do we play it safe in our lives and not go the extra mile to promote God's kingdom?
- ▶ When was the last time you took a risk when it came to matters of faith and morals?
- ▶ What does it mean to you to have to wait for the master? How do we wait today? For what do we wait?
- ▶ Imagine you have been charged with being a Christian—working to establish God's reign here on earth. Would there be enough evidence to convict you? What evidence is there?
- ▶ Imagine that you have it on good authority that the world is ending soon. You do not know the day or the hour, but all signs are certainly pointing to the end. What would be your response?
- ▶ In what way is God speaking to you in this Gospel?
- ▶ Have you ever had to wait for something very important in your life? What did you learn in the waiting? What would you tell others about the mystery of waiting? Is waiting a good thing or a bad thing?
- ▶ What does waiting accomplish in us?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

Appendix

- Have you ever had to wait for something very important in your life? What did you learn in the waiting? What would you tell others about the mystery of waiting? Is waiting a good thing or a bad thing? What does waiting accomplish in us?

I have been waiting for fourteen years for my son's mental illness to improve. Rather than improve, he continues to deteriorate. As I write this we are faced with having to commit him tomorrow. He is sicker than he has ever been. My behavior toward the illness of late has been less than stellar. We are powerless and at the end of our ropes. We have *waited* for the Lord to act for what seems to be a life-time.

What has waiting accomplished in me? If I would be truly honest there are times I wonder if it has accomplished anything. Yet when I am tuned into the Lord as I should be each and every day I am reminded that the Lord's time is not my time and through faith I know that God has always been an eleventh hour God with us. He has always acted when the time was right.

Waiting does accomplish one very important attribute if only I would be open to it. It creates resolve and above all hope that God will act. I am not sure hope can be achieved in any other way. One must have something to hope for, to pray in earnest for, to completely and totally rely on God for, if hope has any chance of springing eternal in the human heart.

If I have learned nothing else I hold out hope as a believer that God has not abandoned my son no matter how tortured he is. I further hope that we are at a crossroads in his illness. We have reached the end and there is nothing more to be done than to sit back and let God act. He needs long term treatment and care. (From my lips to God's ears!) There are few provisions in our state for such care; however, the sicker the person is, the better chance he or she has of getting extended help. Perhaps the powerlessness of this situation is an opportunity for us to wait in faith, thus, by extension to grow in faith. It is what we believe as Catholic Christians.

Thus, once again I would assert that hope that surpasses all understanding can only come when we recognize our powerlessness in the face of God. I cling to such hope with all my heart. I know that our God loves my son as much as I do. I must trust that he is in God's hands! That is my hope and that is my prayer.

- Imagine that you have it on good authority that the world is ending soon. You do not know the day or the hour, but all signs are certainly pointing to the end. What would be your response?

If I knew that the end of the world was coming soon, I would want to first examine my heart and my motives. I would ask forgiveness (something I should do everyday anyway) for the arrogance, pride and lack of humility in my heart. I would hopefully make amends with all I have hurt in my life. I would want to share the Good News with as many as I could reach. I would more fervently reach out to the poor and disenfranchised and I would nurture my most intimate relationships.

As I write this, I cannot help but ask myself, “If that is what I would do if I heard the end was near, shouldn’t those things be my priority right now?” Are not those things the priority of every disciple”? Indeed they are.

I could and should say that I want to do all those things more earnestly. I most especially would want to examine my heart and my motives. I know I can be my own worst enemy and fool myself more than I fool anyone else. Thus it behooves me to practice the art of examining my conscience.

Each of us will have our own end of the world; thus further behooving us to live each day as though it were upon us. We are blessed with a liturgical year that provides us with those reminders.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Holy Spirit
Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and
Purgatory.
Stewardship

Saints
Liturgical Year
Kingdom of God
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

HOLY SPIRIT

The Old Testament reading speaks of the valued treasure of wisdom. As Christians we believe that wherever wisdom exists, the Holy Spirit is present. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the HOLY SPIRIT.

ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

These last days of the liturgical year focus on last things, end times and Jesus return. The parable of the talents is a prelude to the "either-or" context of the last judgment--people are either saved or not saved. In today's parable, there is an exhortation to diligently wait and a mandate to grow in faith or face the consequences of judgment. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

STEWARDSHIP

Interpreters suggest that there is another meaning in this parable—it is about the proper use of gifts. This parable challenges anyone who is blessed with special gifts (probably the gift of Christian service). The third slave in the story does not love his master, and his only concern is self-interest. The only thing he cares about is his own security—not the service he should provide. He failed to put even his small and limited gift of service to worthwhile use in the kingdom of God. Everyone in the community is gifted. Some more than others. Whether our gift is meager or abundant it is to be shared and multiplied. It is thus most fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the proper use of one's resources—STEWARDSHIP.

SAINTS

In these last days of the liturgical cycle we focus on the communion of saints—the saints on earth and the saints in heaven that share the eschatological banquet in the Eucharist. We recently celebrated the feast of All Saints and All Souls. It is thus a proper time for us to focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about the SAINTS.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. As the present Church year is winding down and a new year is soon to begin, it is appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

KINGDOM OF GOD

The parables of these past weeks are for the purpose of teaching people what it means to live in the kingdom Jesus came to establish. The reality he proposes transcends the expected norms of their culture and society. It is a new reality—the city of God in which all citizens stand equal before God. Thus, it is most fitting on these last days of the liturgical year that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.